

# CALIFORNIA'S ECOLOGICAL RESERVES

## SPECIAL PROTECTION FOR SPECIAL PLACES

It may seem confusing, but the Department has two types of habitat designations: ecological reserves and wildlife areas. What are the differences between the two? Well, not as much as one might think, these days! Originally, wildlife areas were acquired to provide hunting opportunities, decrease agricultural crop destruction by migrating species, and to provide a variety of habitats for common game species. Ecological reserves were, and still are, acquired primarily to protect special habitats and the rare species which depend upon them. This doesn't mean that wildlife areas do not protect rare species, because they, too, offer crucial habitats for many threatened animals and plants. And it doesn't mean that hunting or angling isn't allowed on ecological reserves either! On certain reserves, determined on a case-by-case review, some types of restricted hunting are permitted, because it would cause no harm to the protected species and is considered compatible with other management goals.

The ecological reserve system was authorized by the Legislature in 1968 with the acquisition and designation of Buena Vista Lagoon as an ecological reserve in San Diego County. Initially, the Department protected mostly coastal wetlands, which were quickly succumbing to the pressures of development. These reserves provided marine life with a haven from divers, anglers, and commercial enterprise, and provided rare species with places to nest, spawn, or forage. Gradually, Department interests turned toward other areas of the state, like the Owens Valley and the Carrizo Plains, which protect species such as rare desert pupfish, the Owens tui chub, kit fox, bluntnosed leopard lizard, and many rare plant species found nowhere else on Earth.

Today, 109 ecological reserves throughout the state protect more than 112,000 acres of habitat. Many are devoted exclusively to the protection and restoration of endangered species, while others protect uncommon habitats such as riparian woodlands and vernal pools. Funding for the purchase of these reserves comes from many sources, including the personalized environmental license plate fund, public initiative-sponsored legislation, bond acts, and mitigation efforts.

In addition to coastal and landlocked ecological reserves, there are four new and different marine ecological reserves created by the Marine Resources Protection Act (Gill Net Initiative), passed by voters in 1990. These offshore reserves, each a minimum of two square miles, are restricted to scientific research relating to the management and enhancement of marine resources.

Like wildlife areas, ecological reserves are managed for the benefit of all plants and animals that live in or use their habitats, whether that means providing water supply systems, removing non-native species, or restoring native habitat on these lands. The Department continues to study the plants and animals inhabiting ecological reserves to further enhance recovery efforts and to ensure that this natural heritage remains for generations to come. Please visit the Department's website to learn more about ecological reserves and wildlife areas.



# California Dept of Fish and Game

## Ecological Reserves

